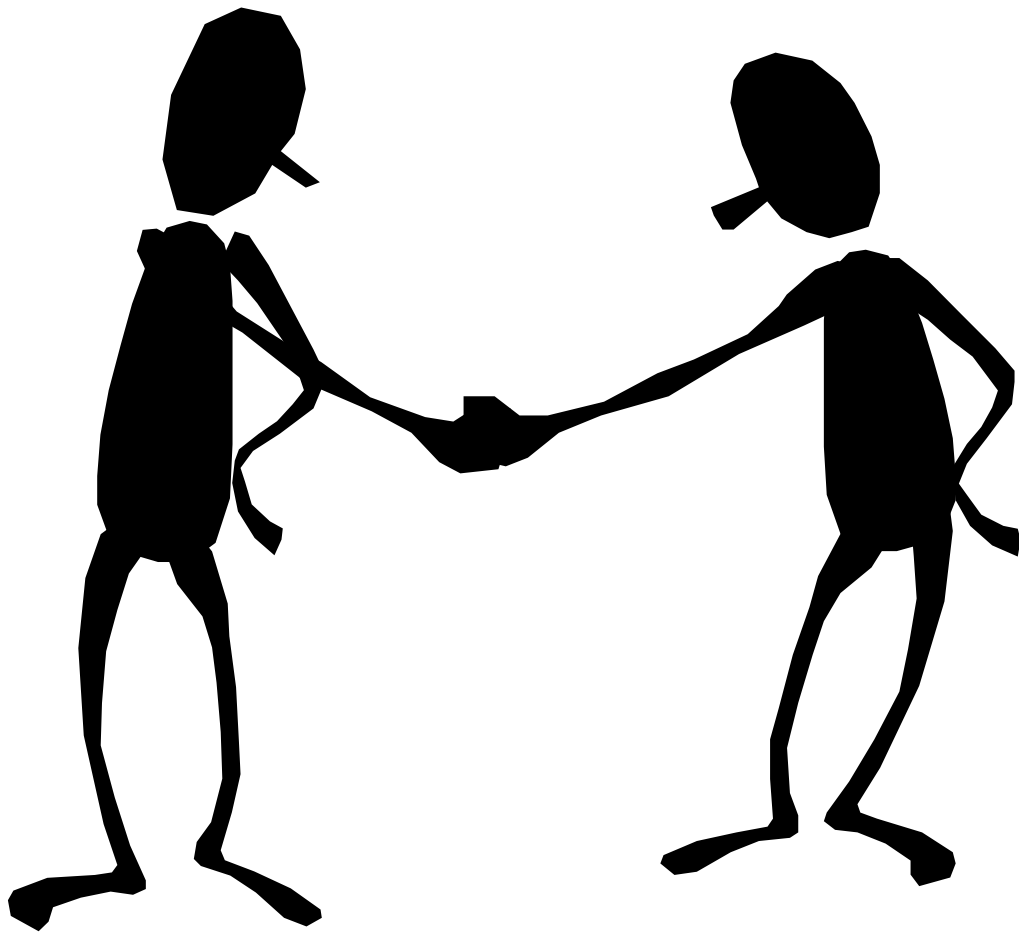
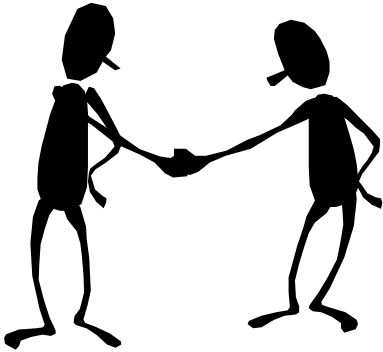


Community Partnerships



Building Community Partnerships

If *Schools Build Assets* is to meet the individual needs of students and schools and be reflective of the community, some groundwork for building community partnerships will need to be completed before implementing the program.



A critical key to success is collaboration. Begin the process by building relationships with community organizations where students will potentially perform community service-learning. Make a personal visit to these organizations. Learn about the work they do and how they do it. Become acquainted with the individuals who will spend time with the youth in your program. Determine whether they offer the experiences and hours available that will be needed to successfully implement a project with that organization.

Collaboration will also help build the relationships necessary to support the program with such things as adult volunteers and donated materials. In addition, students performing community service-learning will need some degree of supervision throughout the project at the partnership site. This supervisor might be the *Schools Build Assets* coordinator, a school or community staff person, or another volunteer adult.

A list of possible community service-learning opportunities can be compiled following visits to local agencies and organizations. This will provide the students with ideas for potential projects that meet the criteria for both service *and* learning components within the program.

The students will select their community service-learning projects based on their interests, skills, abilities, and talents, and should be able to express why that particular activity is important to them personally. The students will also take into consideration personal values, interests, culture, strengths, and needs, as well as the incident that resulted in suspension or expulsion. Community service-learning is meant to be a personal learning experience *and* an opportunity to contribute to the community.



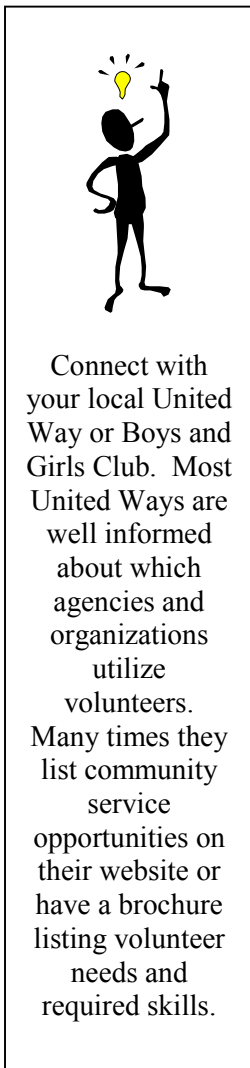
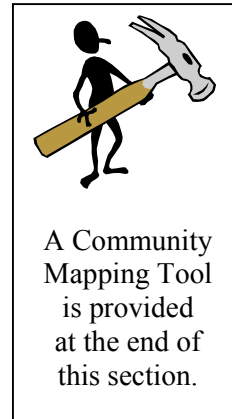
Ensure Successful Collaboration

- Build relationships with key community partners
- Personally visit each community partner
- Learn about their work and how they do it
- Get to know the individuals who will work with students
- Explore potential community service-learning opportunities

Finding Potential Partners: Building Relationships

Finding the right service-learning opportunities for students can be more difficult than it first appears; however, begin by building trusting relationships. It is possible to create long-lasting, student-school-community partnerships based on communication, trust, and a willingness to work together. It is also important that the community service-learning opportunity meets a need for the agency, organization, or community partner. It is equally important that it is a *learning experience* for the students throughout the process of serving.

Potential community partners are everywhere. Perhaps it is easiest to start with the most obvious and receptive partners:



- Organizations that already work with or serve youth.
- Non-profit organizations focused on meeting the needs of families.
- Area business and organization networking groups. This is the Chamber of Commerce in many communities. This group is accustomed to networking and building relationships that will benefit the community. Ask to go to their meetings.
- Check with all the local civic groups, such as Kiwanis, Rotary, and the Optimist Clubs. They are also looking for ways to network and build relationships to benefit the community.
- Look around your community. Does the local library need a facelift? Are there elderly persons in your neighborhood who needs their driveway repaired or their lawn and garden cared for? Does a daycare center need students to help with a special event? These all make great community service-learning opportunities while connecting young people to community members.

Additional ways to find community resources and build healthy working relationships throughout the community:

- Establish an advisory committee and use them to locate sites for placement.
- Make personal contacts with agencies.
- Create an information packet about the program to share with school administrators and agency administrators and boards.
- Plan an open house for agencies to come and learn more about the program.
- Become a personal advocate for the program. Advocates can be students, school staff and administration, and community partners.



A list of additional community resources is available at the end of this section.

One option to consider is whether to advertise within your community that your students will be doing community service-learning and are available to help those in need. Encourage organizations that serve others to call and ask for help. Encourage the elderly, ill, and disabled to ask for help with lawn mowing, snow removal, meal preparation, or small home repairs, etc. This may be especially effective in smaller communities where traditional service organizations are few, or are located several miles away.

Tips for Making Successful Community Contacts

- Contact the person who coordinates volunteers or will help supervise the project.
- Go prepared with a good description of the proposed project, the purpose of community service-learning, and enough details to begin a discussion.
- Be specific about availability and time requirements. Have that information available before you make the phone call or visit. Talk about supervision, roles, and responsibilities of the student, the school or program coordinator, and the business or organization.
- Discuss any barriers (such as age requirements) openly without compromising the confidentiality of the students involved.
- Focus on *meaningful* opportunities. Remember this should be a learning experience that builds the skills of the students involved.
- Keep in mind that students can really only focus their attention so long. Keep the project and time requirements reasonable and realistic for youth.

Potential Obstacles

Even with the best planning and groundwork in place, it is inevitable that there will be a few obstacles to overcome. Potential obstacles you may need to consider include the following:

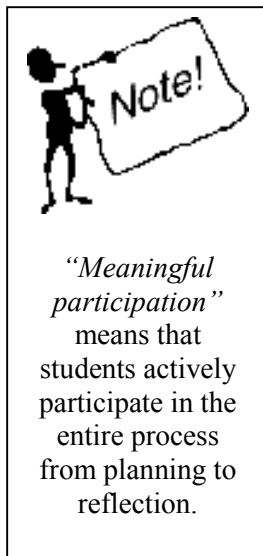
- The label of the “suspended or expelled” youth may make it difficult to find locations for community service-learning outside of the pilot location itself.
- The students will need close supervision.
- In some cases, there are a limited number of sites available for implementing the project, and these sites have limits to the numbers of students they will take.
- Some agencies have age limits for their volunteers so young students may be hard to place.
- Confidentiality issues at the agency and with the youth themselves must be respected.
- Scheduling times to work on the projects must be coordinated.

- Students who have special-needs may be hard to place and may need to have projects brought into their classroom rather than transporting the students to the agency.
- Transportation issues must be resolved.
- Insurance and other legal issues must be reconciled before beginning a project.
- Some agencies have special requirements of volunteers, (e.g. Tuberculosis tests).
- Seasonal issues (weather) are important factors for some projects.
- The most successful projects will closely match the youth's interests with the agency's need.

Building Life Skills

Once a community partner has been identified and community service-learning project ideas have been suggested to students, the real skill building and learning begins. The community service-learning project should include *meaningful participation by the students*.

“Meaningful” means that students *actively* participate in the entire process and do not just volunteer or are assigned for a single task. Community service-learning is sometimes considered similar to a shadowing experience, an internship opportunity, or a mini-apprenticeship.



Connecting youth to skilled professionals throughout the project offers tremendous opportunities for students to learn a variety of new skills. These skills may include researching, planning, decision-making, problem-solving, scheduling, implementing, and evaluating a project or activity. Building these skills enhances their ability to analyze critical elements and communicate their ideas with confidence.

It is also important that the community service-learning project provides an opportunity for students to use their identified strengths, talents, and interests. If at all possible, a “match” should be encouraged between the students and the type of project, activity, or program that best enhances their skills.

The skill building will vary tremendously, depending upon the abilities of the students, the support they receive in building life skills during the classroom time of the ***Schools Build Assets*** program, the length of time they can devote to the community service-learning project, and the level of participation the community partner is able to provide. Community service-learning is well beyond having a group of students come into a business to complete a single task. Rather, it is working “side-by-side,” teaching, modeling, and engaging the student.

Opportunities to Participate

The central element of community service-learning is the “opportunity to participate.” It is important to frame community service-learning as an opportunity. This increases the

likelihood that the experience will truly be from a strength-based approach. Obviously, the students participating in this program have many challenges, issues, and consequences that are not strength-based. Assisting them in “setting themselves up for success” through authentic opportunities to participate will greatly improve their future chances to succeed.

Additional community resources to consider:

- United Way
- Local foundations
- Police departments
- Chamber of Commerce
- Nursing homes
- Elementary schools
- Community Action Agencies
- Humane Society
- YMCA
- Veterans homes
- Business groups
- Food banks
- Rescue Missions
- Boys and Girls Club
- Day care centers
- City governments
- Service Clubs/Organizations
- Community Colleges
- In-house projects
- Senior Centers
- Community Coalitions
- Recreational programs
- Faith communities

Tools



1. Making Change in Our Community: An ACTION Process
2. Building Communities From the Inside-Out!: An Action Planning Guide and Logic Model for Communities
3. Asset Mapping
4. Needs / Concerns Mapping
5. Strength-Based Schools in Strength-Based Communities (PowerPoint Presentation)